

Government of Alberta Response

Connecting the Dots:

Aboriginal Workforce and
Economic Development in Alberta

April 2011 - Report of the MLA Committee on the First Nations,
Métis and Inuit Workforce Planning Initiative

Introduction

In 2008 the Government of Alberta launched the First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Workforce Planning Initiative. Cabinet gave approval to actively engage in dialogue with Aboriginal leaders, communities and stakeholders to discuss issues related to increasing the participation of Aboriginal people in the province's workforce and economy. A four-member MLA Committee was appointed by the Ministers of Aboriginal Relations and Employment and Immigration to champion this engagement, to write a report, and to put forward recommendations for consideration.

The engagement was an opportunity to hear a variety of perspectives, but it was specifically focused on hearing from Aboriginal people. Government wanted to know what Aboriginal people felt the challenges were; what outcomes they wanted, and how they wanted the province to help them achieve those outcomes.

The MLA Committee on the FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative submitted its report, *Connecting the Dots: Aboriginal Workforce and Economic Development in Alberta*, to government in June 2010. The report includes what the MLA Committee heard during its 18-month engagement as well as 30 recommendations. The Government of Alberta accepts 28 recommendations and accepts in principle two recommendations. A Government of Alberta response has been prepared for each of the 30 recommendations, which can be found in **Appendix A**.

For the purposes of implementation, the recommendations have been grouped into **themes**. Each theme has corresponding **strategic priorities** that address the intent of the recommendations. The themes are listed below, the strategic priorities are outlined on the following pages:

- » Collaboration, Coordination and Commitment
- » Education, Learning and Community
- » Urban Aboriginal People
- » Capacity Building – Individual and Community
- » Improving Communication and Awareness

Government ministries involved in the FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative will focus on nine strategic priorities over the next two years. Additional actions related to the 30 recommendations will be determined in the future and implemented over time. Some of the recommendations will also be addressed through the ongoing business plans of ministries that provide or develop programs, services and policies for Aboriginal people.

Making change and finding solutions is a shared responsibility requiring the collective efforts of multiple partners. The Government of Alberta is committed to moving forward in partnership with Aboriginal people and other stakeholders to ensure that Aboriginal people develop the skills they need to benefit from and contribute to the growth of Alberta's economy.

Connecting the Dots

Themes and Strategic Priorities

Collaboration, Coordination and Commitment

Recommendations:

1, 3, 4, 6, 10, 28, 29, 30

Strategic Priorities:

1. The Government of Alberta (GOA) develop an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy that addresses the workforce and skills training needs and goals of urban, rural, remote and young Aboriginal people in Alberta and includes opportunities for continued collaborative planning.
2. The Province, First Nations, Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC), Métis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA), other Aboriginal organizations, and the federal government increase collaboration to improve coordination, reduce duplication, and increase innovation in the delivery of labour market programs and services for Aboriginal people in Alberta.
3. The Government of Alberta review programs and services that support Aboriginal economic development in order to increase coordination across ministries and to streamline grant funding processes and applications.

Education, Learning and Community

Recommendations:

2, 7, 8, 9, 12, 15

Strategic Priorities:

4. The Government of Alberta work with First Nations and Métis leaders and other Aboriginal communities and organizations, the federal government, and educational institutions to achieve better educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in both the K-12 and post-secondary areas.

Urban Aboriginal People

Recommendations:

11, 14

Strategic Priorities:

5. The Government of Alberta, through partnerships, develop strategies and actions for supporting Aboriginal people who choose to transition from reserves, settlements, rural, or remote communities to urban areas for employment, education or training, or to transition between schools, employers and workplaces within urban areas.

Capacity Building – Individual and Community

Recommendations:

13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23

Strategic Priorities:

6. The Government of Alberta support partnerships with Aboriginal communities, industry, training providers, other levels of government to ensure Aboriginal Albertans have access to the skills, tools, information and opportunities needed to increase capacity at the individual and/or community level.
7. The Government of Alberta continue to improve internet connectivity, where feasible, for Aboriginal communities for the purposes of education, training, and economic development.

Improving Communication and Awareness

Recommendations:

5, 24, 25, 26, 27

Strategic Priorities:

8. The Government of Alberta identify opportunities to make it easier for Aboriginal people to connect with programs and services for Aboriginal people and with programs and services available to all Albertans. The GOA will also explore ways to improve communication between ministries that serve Aboriginal people.
9. Culture and Community Spirit, Aboriginal Relations, and Employment and Immigration, with other ministries as appropriate, develop initiatives that support a greater sense of belonging for Aboriginal people in the workplace and/or community.

Conclusion

The Ministers of Aboriginal Relations and Employment & Immigration would like to thank the members of the MLA Committee on the FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative – Verlyn Olson, Chair, MLA Wetaskiwin-Camrose; Pearl Calahasen, MLA Lesser Slave Lake; Tony Vandermeer, MLA Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview; and Evan Berger, MLA Livingstone-Macleod – for their contributions to this report.

The Ministers would also like to express their appreciation to all of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit people in Alberta who

contributed to this report by participating in the engagement and by providing their input. The input the MLA Committee received from industry, educational institutions, training providers, service providers, community organizations, among others, was also much appreciated.

To demonstrate its commitment to making a difference, the Government of Alberta will monitor the implementation of the strategic priorities outlined above and report on the results achieved within two years.

Appendix A

Government of Alberta (GOA) Response to *Connecting the Dots*

	Recommendation	GOA Response
1	In collaboration with First Nations, Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC), Métis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA), and other Aboriginal communities, the Government of Alberta continue to support the development and implementation of community-based collaborative workforce action plans. (p. 45)	ACCEPT Government's participation in the development and implementation of collaborative action plans designed at the community level is central to building and maintaining relationships with First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations for the purpose of increasing labour force participation and economic development for Aboriginal Albertans. This recommendation will also be addressed in the creation of an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy, as outlined in Recommendation #28.
2	The Government of Alberta, in partnership with First Nations, develop strategies to press the federal government to address any inequities in Kindergarten to Grade 12 education funding which impedes First Nation student success. (p. 12)	ACCEPT Government is committed to achieving better educational outcomes for First Nation students in Alberta. This recommendation will be addressed through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for First Nations Education in Alberta signed in 2010 by the Government of Alberta, the Government of Canada and the Grand Chiefs of Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7, and Treaty No. 8 representing the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs in Alberta. A key commitment of the MOU is improving education resourcing and supports.
3	The Province, First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, other Aboriginal organizations, and the federal government increase collaboration to improve coordination, reduce duplication, and increase innovation in the delivery of labour market programs and services for Aboriginal people in Alberta. (p. 25)	ACCEPT The Government of Alberta recognizes the relationship between the Government of Canada and First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations for the purposes of labour market programming and services for Aboriginal people in Alberta, in particular, the federal Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS). The Government of Alberta will increase collaboration and coordination with the organizations listed above to ensure there is not duplication with its programs and services and that the labour market and employment training needs of Aboriginal Albertans are being met.

	Recommendation	GOA Response
4	The Government of Alberta, First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations increase collaboration to determine employment and training program needs in order to take advantage of opportunities with local industry. (p. 25)	ACCEPT Increasing collaboration and partnership between Government ministries, industry and employers, educational institutions, training providers, and First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations in determining local employment and training needs will lead to better opportunities for employment and increased economic development for Aboriginal people and communities.
5	The Government of Alberta examine the system of standards and safety certification imposed by industry to determine if it acts as a deterrent to employment and entrepreneurship for Aboriginal people. (p. 30)	ACCEPT-IN-PRINCIPLE Industry has developed its own safety standards and certification requirements based on Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation and programs and its own commitment to safe workplaces. Although the Government has no intention to lower safety standards, the government will continue to work with its stakeholder partners to ensure an ongoing and positive dialogue with First Nations and Métis employers, businesses and communities about current requirements and to provide advice and education on workplace health and safety.
6	The Government of Alberta review the array of programs and services it delivers and/or funds to support Aboriginal employment and labour market training with the goal of increasing coordination, creating efficiencies, streamlining processes and reporting requirements, and eliminating duplication. (p. 26)	ACCEPT A review of the Government of Alberta's programs and services that support Aboriginal employment and labour market training will be addressed through the development of an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy as outlined in Recommendation #28.
7	The Government of Alberta and Aboriginal communities engage with training providers and educational institutions to improve the quality of learner assessments (i.e. abilities, skills, interests, job prospects, etc.) to ensure an optimum fit between a client's career aspirations and government-funded training opportunities. (p. 27)	ACCEPT Employment and Immigration (E&I), in collaboration with Advanced Education and Technology (AET), is reviewing the model it uses to assess learners for services, programming and training. Following this review, consultations will take place with stakeholders, including training providers, educational institutions and Aboriginal communities.

	Recommendation	GOA Response
8	The Government of Alberta, educational institutions, training providers, and Aboriginal communities review policies related to learner assessments and eligibility (as it relates to Aboriginal learners) with a view to increasing flexibility or creating efficiencies. (p. 27)	ACCEPT The review being undertaken by E&I and AET (as outlined above) will look at improving flexibility and efficiencies that lead to improved outcomes for all learners, including Aboriginal learners.
9	Expand the length of time allowed for Aboriginal learners (who receive government funding for training) to complete academic upgrading if they have had a government-approved literacy assessment that identifies more time is required to be successful. (p. 29)	ACCEPT-IN-PRINCIPLE In 2009, the Government of Alberta released <i>Living Literacy: A Literacy Framework for Alberta's Next Generation Economy</i> . Work is currently underway within ministries to develop actions related to improving literacy rates in Alberta, which will include Aboriginal people. Those actions will consider enhancements to existing models and the potential for new models, with a focus on timely acquisition of literacy and essential skills to support sustainable employment.
10	All Government of Alberta departments that provide funding for Aboriginal economic development adopt a cross-ministry strategic approach that increases coordination, joint planning, transparency, and assessment of viable opportunities for Aboriginal communities. (p. 36)	ACCEPT A review of the Government of Alberta's programs and services that support Aboriginal economic development and entrepreneurship will be addressed, in part, in the development of an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy as outlined in Recommendation #28. Government will streamline economic development grant funding, applications, and processes between ministries.
11	The Province adopt ways to enhance transitional support services in major urban settings in partnership with urban Aboriginal organizations, such as Friendship Centres, and in collaboration with other levels of government. (p. 43)	ACCEPT The GOA, through a cross-ministry approach and in partnership with urban Aboriginal organizations, municipal governments, and other stakeholders will develop strategies and actions for supporting Aboriginal people to transition from reserves or settlements to urban areas for employment, education or training, or to transition between schools, employers and workplaces within urban areas.
12	Aboriginal communities, school boards and parents, with the help of the province where appropriate, develop and implement strategies for increased opportunities for Aboriginal families to become more involved in the education of their children. (p. 20)	ACCEPT Increasing opportunities for Aboriginal families to become more involved in the education of their children requires the combined efforts of Aboriginal communities, school boards, government, and parents. The Government of Alberta is supporting these efforts through the FNMI Education Partnership Council, which was formed in 2009, and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for First Nations Education in Alberta, signed in 2010.

	Recommendation
13	The Government of Alberta actively engage with First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations to develop skills inventories, local level data, and labour market studies that can be used to support long-term community, workforce and economic development planning. (p. 33)
14	The Province continue to support and foster urban Aboriginal partnerships and initiatives that address the employment, education and economic development priorities of urban Aboriginal communities. (p. 43)
15	The Government of Alberta explore ways to maximize the effectiveness of First Nations Colleges in Alberta given their unique location, status and program focus on Aboriginal student success. (p. 22)
16	The Government of Alberta develop and implement a cross-ministry employment strategy to attract, recruit and retain qualified Aboriginal people into the Alberta Public Service. (p. 46)
17	The Government of Alberta support individual and organizational capacity development for First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations through exchange opportunities, such as internships, secondments and mentoring. (p. 32)

GOA Response

ACCEPT

Government is exploring ways to work with Aboriginal organizations and communities to assist them with accessing or creating the tools, information, and data they need to develop skills inventories of community members and to carry out long-term workforce and economic development planning.

ACCEPT

Government encourages the development of more urban Aboriginal partnerships to create employment, education and economic development opportunities for a growing urban Aboriginal population in Alberta. This recommendation will be addressed further in the development of an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy, as outlined in Recommendation #28.

ACCEPT

Government will seek input through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology on the relationship with, and the role and mandate of, First Nations Colleges in Alberta with a view to exploring ways to maximize their effectiveness.

ACCEPT

The Government of Alberta as an employer will: review the selection and recruitment business process to identify processes that may act as an unintended barrier to potential Aboriginal applicants; continue to support the attraction of Aboriginal peoples through initiatives such as the GOA Ambassador program; and, collaborate with existing Aboriginal employees to determine what would make the GOA as an employer, a welcoming place that enhances the engagement of Aboriginal employees.

ACCEPT

Government of Alberta ministries would identify, facilitate and coordinate these exchanges/secondments and mentoring opportunities with Aboriginal communities and/or organizations. Deputy Ministers would be able to advance and support these exchanges/secondments and mentoring opportunities within their respective Ministries.

	Recommendation	GOA Response
18	The Government of Alberta ensure that rural and remote Aboriginal people and communities have internet-based options for accessing education and training to prepare for employment and lifelong learning. (p. 21)	ACCEPT Service Alberta, the ministry responsible for Alberta's Supernet, is launching the <i>Final Mile</i> initiative that will over time expand connectivity to currently underserved locations in Alberta, including Aboriginal communities.
19	Given the increasing number of temporary foreign workers employed in the province, the Government of Alberta work with the Government of Canada to promote the hiring of Aboriginal people in Alberta. (p. 39)	ACCEPT The Government acknowledges the growing number of Aboriginal people as an important source of labour for Alberta, however, the nature of the province's economy requires additional sources of labour. The federal government's Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program is one such source. To ensure that Aboriginal people are hired into the Alberta workforce and economy will require the joint efforts of the Governments of Alberta and Canada, First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, educational institutions, industry, and other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations. The Government of Alberta, through increased collaboration and the development of an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy, will increase efforts to work with the Government of Canada to promote the hiring of Aboriginal people in Alberta.
20	First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations work with all levels of government and partner organizations to create an environment for encouraging more entrepreneurial activity in Aboriginal communities across Alberta. (p. 36)	ACCEPT Government supports creating an environment for increasing entrepreneurialism, productivity, and competitiveness. It welcomes the opportunity to work with First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations to develop more Aboriginal entrepreneurs and businesses in communities across Alberta. Government encourages all Aboriginal leaders to access the provincial programs, services and supports that are currently available.
21	The Government of Alberta press the federal government to expand information technology infrastructure on reserve to ensure First Nations people living on reserves in Alberta are able to access Internet services for the purposes of education, training, business and economic development. (p. 32)	ACCEPT The Government of Alberta, through Service Alberta's <i>Final Mile</i> initiative, will pursue and coordinate with the federal government's <i>Broadband Canada: Connecting Rural Canadians</i> program to expand connectivity and infrastructure, where feasible, to currently underserved locations on First Nations reserves in Alberta.

	Recommendation	GOA Response
22	The Government of Alberta partner with MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations to ensure Aboriginal people and their communities are able to access Internet services for the purposes of education, training, business and economic development. (p. 32)	ACCEPT This recommendation is in line with Service Alberta's <i>Final Mile</i> initiative to expand connectivity to currently underserved locations in Alberta.
23	First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations pursue partnerships with other levels of government, business, industry, and training providers to provide information technology (IT) resources (i.e. hardware and software) and training to take advantage of Internet connectivity. (p. 32)	ACCEPT Government encourages First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal organizations to take leadership in this area and to explore partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, including industry, municipal, provincial and federal governments.
24	The Government of Alberta, First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal communities, develop and implement strategies with other levels of government, business, industry, and organizations to eliminate racism and to increase awareness of the contributions of Aboriginal peoples, cultures and communities to Alberta. (p. 18)	ACCEPT The Government of Alberta protects human rights, promotes fairness and access, and supports the inclusion of all Albertans. The Ministries of Culture and Community Spirit, Aboriginal Relations, and Employment and Immigration and other ministries as appropriate will work across government to develop strategies and create partnerships with other levels of government, industry and organizations to increase the awareness of the contributions of Aboriginal peoples, cultures and communities to Alberta and to eliminate racism.
25	The Government of Alberta explore ways to improve communication with First Nations, Métis and other Aboriginal communities and organizations about provincial programs and services for Aboriginal people, and to improve awareness and linkages across ministries that serve Aboriginal people. (p. 47)	ACCEPT Government ministries will identify opportunities to make it easier for Aboriginal people to connect with programs and services for Aboriginal people as well as programs and services available to all Albertans. It will also explore ways to improve communication between ministries that serve Aboriginal people.

	Recommendation	GOA Response
26	Employment and Immigration ensure Aboriginal people in Alberta can access provincial career counseling and employment services that are available to all Albertans. (p. 30)	ACCEPT Employment and Immigration (E&I) will ensure that staff is aware of their responsibility to ensure that career counseling and employment services are available to Aboriginal people who seek such assistance at E&I service delivery offices located throughout the province.
27	Ensure that Aboriginal people and communities are aware that provincially-funded English-as-a-Second Language programs may be available to eligible Aboriginal learners. (p. 23)	ACCEPT Government (primarily the ministries of Employment and Immigration and Advanced Education and Technology) will increase awareness of and communication about English-as-a-Second Language programs and eligibility requirements to training providers, community learning councils, and Aboriginal people and organizations in Alberta.
28	In keeping with the Province's commitment to a long-term workforce strategy, the Government of Alberta develop an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy, informed by the PMMI Workforce Planning Initiative and engagement process. (p. 48)	ACCEPT Employment & Immigration will lead the development of an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy that encompasses collaborative planning at the community level as outlined in Recommendation #1.
29	Further engagement regarding workforce participation and economic development continue on a government-to-government basis through new or existing mechanisms, agreements or arrangements. (p. 48)	ACCEPT The Government of Alberta will continue to engage on a government-to-government basis with First Nations and Métis Settlements to address workforce participation and economic development. Existing mechanisms for engagement include the Protocol Agreement on Government-to-Government Relations (May 2008) and the Metis Settlements Act.
30	The dialogue between the Government of Alberta, First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and other Aboriginal communities, and the Government of Canada continue, with the commitment of all being that it leads to real action that makes a difference. (p. 43)	ACCEPT The Government of Alberta is committed to helping Aboriginal people in Alberta experience the same opportunities as all Albertans. It's important for all parties to fulfill their obligations and for all parties to work together. Making a real difference for Aboriginal people will require the coordinated efforts of municipal, provincial, federal, First Nations, MSGC, MNAA, and Aboriginal leaders, organizations, and communities.

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